

Character Class

Ghoul -- Dead and Hungry

By Skip Williams



There's something oddly compelling about the flesh-eating ghoul. It has deadly claws and teeth that can inflict more than physical wounds. Ghouls lurk in the dark places of the world, feasting on the dead, but craving fresher prey. Most adventurers are opportunistic hunters of a sort, and a ghoulish existence isn't a bad choice for a player character. Thanks to the rules in *Libris Mortis*, **D&D** players can sample existence as a ghoul. These rules allow players to create various kinds of undead characters by treating certain undead monsters as special character classes. Players choose a race (usually a standard race such as human or elf, but any race the campaign allows) and then adopts the mantle of undeath just as if playing any other character class.



Assets

A ghoul can prove formidable, and a ghast is even more dangerous. Either creature has an impressive array of natural weaponry and nasty special attacks. One class covers both creatures. You begin as a ghoul and eventually become a ghast as you progress through the class. Here's an overview of the ghoul's capabilities:

- **Ability Score Adjustments:** Because a ghoul is really a kind of creature and not merely a character class, you change your ability scores when you enter the ghoul class. When you become a ghoul, increase your Dexterity and Wisdom scores by +2. A ghoul has no Constitution score. No matter what your Constitution score was when you entered the class, you drop that score when you become a ghoul. See page 312 in the *Monster Manual* for a discussion of what it means to lack a Constitution score.

As a ghoul gains levels, it gains additional Dexterity and Wisdom. A ghoul also gains Strength, Charisma, and Intelligence as it gains levels in the class.

- **Undead Traits:** As an undead creature, a ghoul gains a host of immunities and other qualities. See page 317 in the *Monster Manual* or page 35 of *Libris Mortis* for details.
- **Natural Armor:** A ghoul's natural armor bonus increases by +1 at 1st level. A ghoul receives additional natural armor increases at 3rd, 6th, and 8th levels,
- **Bite Attack:** Also at 1st level, a ghoul gains a bite attack as a natural weapon. The bite attack becomes more powerful at 4th level and more powerful again at 7th level.

- **Claw Attacks:** At 2nd level, a ghoul gains two claw attacks as secondary natural weapons (the ghoul suffers a -5 penalty on attack rolls with its claws and uses only half its Strength bonus on damage from its claws). The ghoul's claws become more powerful at 7th level. Once you gain claw attacks, you qualify for the Multiattack feat, which reduces your secondary weapon penalty considerably (see *Monster Manual*, page 304).
- **Paralysis:** Also at 2nd level, a ghoul's bite or claw attack can paralyze a living foe -- except for an elf -- for one round. At 4th level, ghoul paralysis lasts 1d4+1 rounds. At 8th level, a ghoul's paralysis also affects elves.
- **Ghoul Fever:** At 5th level, a ghoul's bite attack carries a disease that saps a foe's Constitution and Dexterity scores. A creature that dies from ghoul fever rises as a ghoul at the first midnight following its death.
- **Stench:** At 8th level, a ghoul emits a powerful stench that can sicken living creatures within 10 feet.

Weaknesses

The ghoul's powers come at a price. Here are a few you'll want to be aware of when considering a ghoul character:

- **Few Hit Dice:** A ghoul has 12-sided hit dice. The ghoul class, however, grants only four hit dice, at 1st, 3rd, 6th, and 8th level.
- **Mediocre Hit Points:** The ghoul's lack of a Constitution score combines with its low number of hit dice to produce a fairly low number of hit points.
- **Poor Attack Bonus:** A ghoul's base attack bonus is +1 per two hit dice, which is the poorest in the game. To make matters worse, a ghoul has a limited number of hit dice, as noted earlier.
- **Mediocre Saves:** Undead creatures use the best progression for Will saves and the worst progression for Fortitude and Reflex saves (see Table 3-1 in the *Player's Handbook*). As with attack bonus, however, these saves are based on the ghoul's low number of hit dice. As a consequence, even a ghoul's Will save is fairly weak. The ghoul's Fortitude and Reflex saves are even lower than its Will save. Still, the ghoul's undead creature type allows the character to ignore most effects that allow Fortitude or Will saves. Also, a ghoul's Dexterity and Wisdom adjustments helps offset its weak base save bonuses.
- **Low Skill Points:** A ghoul gains 4 skill points each time it gains a hit die. That sounds generous, but remember that the ghoul class grants only four hit dice.
- **Few Feats:** A ghoul gains feats only at 1st level and again at 6th level (when it gains its 3rd hit die).
- **Poor Weapon and Armor Selection:** A ghoul is proficient with its natural and simple weapons. A ghoul also has no shield or armor proficiency. This limits the character's fighting options somewhat.
- **Limited Advancement:** The ghoul class has only eight levels, which makes multiclassing a virtual requirement for a ghoul character. Moreover, once you enter the class you must complete all eight levels of the class before adding a level in any other class. You cannot have levels in more than one undead monster class (see page 34 in *Libris Mortis*). It's usually best to have a few levels in another class before becoming a ghoul. Fortunately, you do not suffer an experience penalty for having a monster class (see page 35 in *Libris Mortis*).

A ghoul can enter any class for which the character qualifies. Some classes, however, combine with the ghoul's abilities better than others do. The class works well with the ranger, rogue, and fighter classes. Most arcane spellcasting classes also work well for ghouls, especially bard and sorcerer (thanks to the ghoul's Charisma increases). A ghoul can function well as a cleric, too.

- **Undead Weaknesses:** Ghoul characters are subject to turning, destruction, or control by clerics and other characters that can turn or rebuke undead. A ghoul gains +2 turn resistance at 1st level, which helps it withstand clerical assaults a little bit. Ghoul characters also are destroyed when their hit points fall to 0 or less.
- **Impact on Other Classes:** Ghoul clerics lose their ability to turn undead but gain the ability to rebuke undead. Ghoul sorcerers and wizards lose their familiars (if they have any) except for rats or bats. The character can summon another familiar, but it must be a rat or bat.

Playing a Classy Ghoul

As noted earlier, the ghoul class works best when combined with another class. Your second class will determine what your allies expect from you and what you must do to succeed overall. Still, there are a few things every ghoul must see to.

Be Careful Around Strangers

The rules don't mention it, but ghouls don't readily pass as living creatures. If you must interact with regular folk, be prepared to conceal your true nature somehow. At the beginning of your ghoulish career, an enveloping cloak and hood probably is sufficient. Once you develop your stench power, you don't have many options beyond keeping your distance or using some kind of shape changing magic to keep your true nature under wraps.

When successfully posing as a living creature, keep your ghoulish impulses under control. You might find corpses delectable, but dining on a body in public is a bad idea.

Scratch 'em Up

Your paralysis ability is your most potent weapon (once you gain it), though it's effective only against living creatures. Your paralysis attack works through your natural weaponry, so it pays to get in close to living foes and wield your teeth and claws against them. You can defeat a whole group of living foes simply by attacking one until paralysis sets in, then moving to the next foe and repeating the process.

Deal Quickly with Paralyzed Foes

When you paralyze a foe, remember that the effect is only temporary. At 2nd level, a foe you paralyze remains so for only one round. At 4th level, ghoul-induced paralysis lasts 1d4+1 rounds and that's the maximum duration ghoul paralysis reaches. This means that you can count on a mere two rounds of paralysis, though the effect can last longer. You can simply allow the paralysis effect to lapse (two or more rounds of inactivity from a foe can prove telling in a pitched battle), but it's far more effective to do something to eliminate the foe from the battle. You can do so yourself by binding the foe, performing a *coup de grace*, or simply grabbing a paralyzed foe's weapon or other key item. You might also persuade an ally to deal with opponents you paralyze. If you favor the latter, it's best to arrange this with your allies ahead of time.

Don't Stink Things Up

After you develop your stench power, you'll find it difficult to work closely with living allies. You can limit the effect

of your stench by standing a little apart from living members of your party. Remember, however, that once a creature makes a successful saving throw against your stench, it cannot be affected again on the same day. You can use this rule to grant some living foes temporary immunity. Just arrange to expose your living allies to your stench early in the day. Pick a quiet moment when no foes are at hand. This tactic can prove cumbersome when you try to use it with allies who don't have robust Fortitude saves, so you might have to stay at least 15 feet from allies who can't handle your stench.

Key Allies

You'll be most effective in battle when you combine your unique talents with your friends' abilities. Here are a few tips on working well with your colleagues.

The Party's Main Warrior: Work with this character to assess the opposition, and use your powers to best advantage. If your opponents are living and fairly lightly armored, you and the lead warrior can attack different foes. This should allow you to thin out the opposition quickly. Even so, plan to stick close to the main warrior (if your stench power allows) so that the two of you don't get flanked. Against well-armored foes that you have difficulty hitting or foes you can't paralyze, it's usually best to double team a foe along with the party's main warrior. Move to a flanking position if you can to improve your chance of hitting with your attacks.

In any case, make sure your party's main warrior understands that you can't risk going below zero hit points. Ask the fighting character to cover your retreat if you have to withdraw from combat.

If you are the party's main warrior, close to melee range as quickly as you can to bring your natural weaponry and paralyzation attacks into play. If possible, deal with opposing scouts and other lightly armored foes first. These opponents can be paralyzed quickly. Don't ignore the main fighters on the opposing side, however. These enemies can wreak havoc with your party if they slip past you and attack the more vulnerable members of your group.

The Party's Scout: Work with this character in much the same way as you work with your group's main fighter. If you are the party scout, your stealth skills can help you ambush foes and paralyze them before they can counterattack effectively. Don't get too cocky, however. If you find yourself facing several foes alone you can be destroyed quickly.

The Party's Arcane Spellcaster: Be prepared to come to this character's aid when trouble arises. If you intervene promptly when your group's arcane spellcaster comes under attack, your paralyzation ability can stop the threat before the spellcaster suffers serious injury.

If you're the party's arcane spellcaster, your natural armor and undead immunities (not to mention your handful of 12-sided hit dice) make you less vulnerable than most. Your natural weaponry and special attacks also can come as a nasty surprise to foes that enter melee with you. On the other hand, you're not invulnerable, so stay out of the thick of things until the end of an encounter is in sight.

The Party's Divine Spellcaster: It won't hurt to remind this character that you'll require *inflict wounds* spells to heal any damage you suffer. You are vulnerable to clerical turning attempts, especially early in your career. A character with the power to rebuke undead, however, can bolster you against turning attempts.

If you're the party's divine spellcaster, your ability scores and class features probably make you a potent combatant, and you can use your spells to boost your power even more. Keep in mind, however, that your allies are still counting on you for healing and defense. Your Charisma score can make you especially good at rebuking undead yourself.

Some Key Equipment

Your collection of gear will vary depending on what other classes you take in addition to your ghoul class. Still, you'll find a few items useful.

Armor: You'll need to enter melee combat to use your paralyzation, so armor up if you can afford it (and you have the proficiency). Your natural armor bonus allows you to use lighter armor (and keep up your speed) while maintaining a good defense.

If you decide to skip wearing armor, *bracers of armor* can be a good purchase for you. No matter what defensive items you wear, a *ring of protection* is good addition.

Primary Melee Weapon: You rely on your natural weaponry, so a weapon isn't a critical purchase for you. A little magical enhancement never hurts, and a potion of *magic fang* or *greater magic fang* is a useful bit of gear. If you can afford it, an *amulet of mighty fists* continuously improves your natural weapons.

Backup Melee Weapon: Your natural weapons will almost always be your first choice in combat. Your teeth and claws, however, won't prove the best choice for every situation. A bludgeoning weapon is a good choice. Your bite deals bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage, but your claws are slashing weapons. A bludgeoning weapon is useful for dealing with foes that are resistant to slashing weapons. If you're limited to simple weapons, a morningstar or heavy mace is a great choice. A warhammer or flail is a good choice if you have access to martial weapons.

Ranged Weapon: Foes won't always oblige you by closing to melee range. If you have access to martial weapons, a bow or composite bow is a great choice. Choose a short bow if you favor stealth. Choose a long bow if you favor maximum range and damage. If you're limited to simple weapons, you can't beat a crossbow. A light crossbow allows a decent rate of fire. A heavy crossbow deals more damage but doesn't fire quickly.

Miscellaneous Gear: You can improve your fighting ability with items that boost your Strength or Dexterity (or both if you can afford them). Stealth and mobility usually suit a ghoul well. A *cloak of elvenkind*, *dust of disappearance*, or *ring of invisibility* are all great for sneaking around. *Boots of speed* improve mobility and combat ability. Of course, nothing provides mobility like an item that provides the power of flight.

About the Author

Skip Williams keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies and was the Sage of *Dragon Magazine* for many years. Skip is a co-designer of the **D&D** 3rd Edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual*. When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden (rabbits and deer are not Skip's friends) or works on repairing and improving the century-old farmhouse that he shares with his wife, Penny, and a growing menagerie of pets.

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